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BOOKS

Calyx continues to bloom

The nonprofit celebrates 25 years of promoting and publishing women's writing

BY LISA BRADSHAW

It can be a scary world out there for small, independent publishers. Thanks to the superstores and dot-coms of book selling, small presses are disappearing as quickly as they sprang to life amid the feminist, queer and civil rights movements of the '60s and '70s. This wave of corporate domination gives a more poignant touch to the 25th anniversary celebration of Calyx.

As director Margarita Donnelly explains, it was named after a botanical term for the covering of a flower to represent "the flowering of female imagery." From the very beginning to the mid-'80s, when book publishing was added to its repertoire, on up to today, Calyx has continued its mission statement to "nurture women's creativity by publishing fine literary and artistic work."

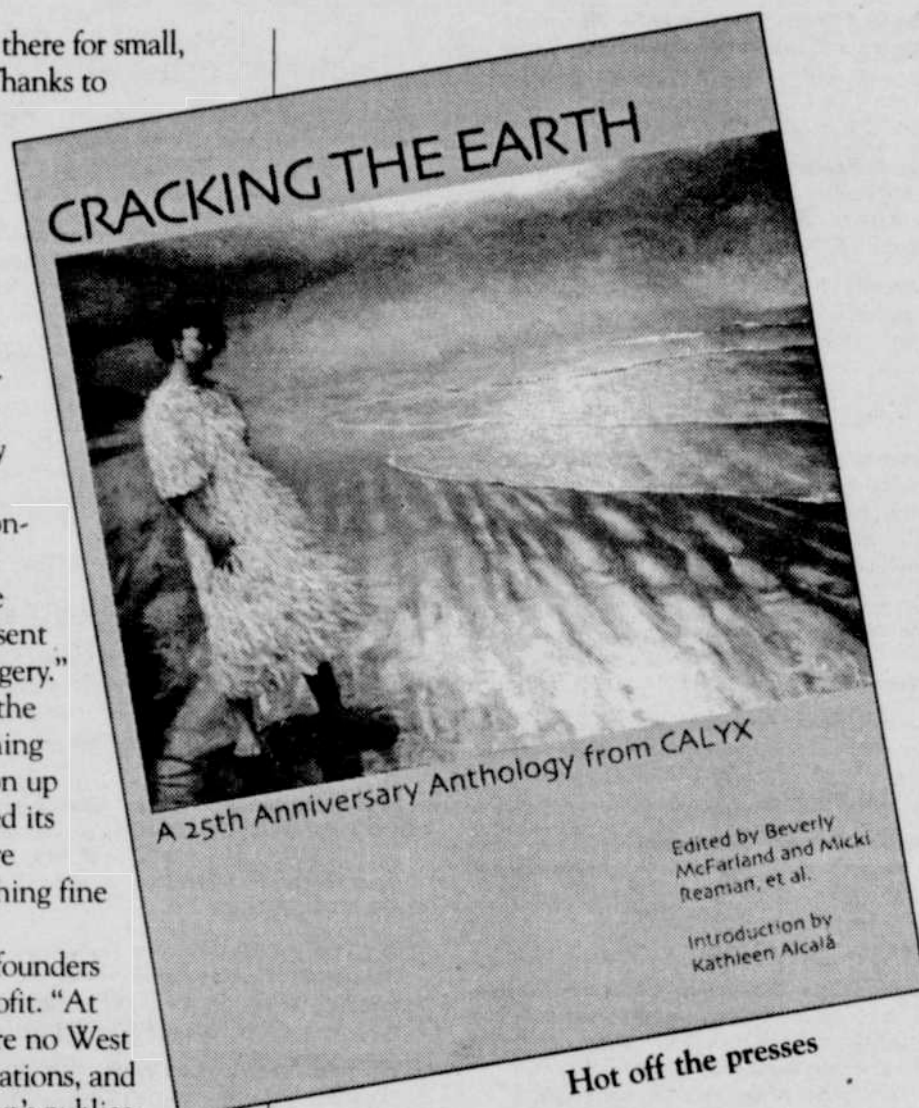
Donnelly was one of the founders of the Corvallis-based nonprofit. "At the time we started there were no West Coast feminist literary publications, and a number of important women's publications had ceased," she says. "We wanted to publish women's literature and art in a beautiful format and have the work speak for itself; we wanted editorial decisions to be made by a group of editors, not just one; and we wanted to treat women writers with respect."

Those ambitious guidelines, coupled with the insistence that the work reflect the experience of many kinds of women—lesbians, working class, women of color, older women, younger women and, Donnelly adds, "women whose voices have not been heard"—have been what set Calyx apart.

One of the most celebrated anthologies in the country, *Calyx: A Journal of Art and Literature by Women* is published twice yearly and consists of what the editorial collective chooses as the best work received out of about 1,000 submissions of prose, poetry, print art and book reviews. The staff is almost completely volunteer based and comes from "varied backgrounds," Donnelly notes. "That diversity is reflected in the work we publish."

Donnelly herself offers a unique perspective as an editor. She was born in Caracas, Venezuela, and raised in the open grasslands of the llanos. While the country's cowboys, llaneros, herded cattle across the plains, Donnelly hunted and fished with her father.

With her three siblings she swam in the piranha-infested waters of the upper llanos, "where there are fewer piranhas and you can get out in time." She further assures, "Our mother checked us for open sores before we went in the rivers."



She was duly inspired by music and literature while growing up. Her father had a band, her mother played the piano, and the family owned many books.

"There were no radios, TV, phones, libraries, movie theaters, etc.," Donnelly remembers. "In the open stretches of the great llanos, we were our own entertainment."

Donnelly's mother died when she was a teen-ager, and she was "shipped north" to attend high school in the United States. "I was overwhelmed to discover libraries full of books I could borrow for free!" she exclaims.

But her arrival in this country was no picnic. She became a Hispanic foreigner in racist 1950s California.

In school "Spanish was banned," Donnelly explains, "and those caught speaking Spanish got demerits. Anyone with demerits could never be on the honor roll, even if we had straight A's."

When she started college as a U.S. citizen, she describes being enrolled in "bonehead English," because she was classified as a foreign student.

Despite her bonehead beginnings, Donnelly graduated from San Francisco State University with an anthropology degree in 1966. She also did

research among the Otomi people in the valley area a few hours north of Mexico City and studied at University of Veracruz in Jalapa.

During her San Francisco years in the '60s, she lived in the Haight-Ashbury District and was involved in the civil rights and peace movements as well as the feminist movement.



Calyx director Margarita Donnelly